

**'Reason' in
the search
for the Divine**

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The INQUIRER

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Inquiring Words

In the inhalation and exhalation there is an energy and a lively divine spirit, since He, through his spirit supports the breath of life, giving courage to the people who are in the earth and spirit to those who walk on it.

— Michael Servetus

Editor's view

Need for 'reason' continues

A couple of summers ago, I saw the play 'Ann Boleyn' at the Globe Theatre. It was a fantastic production. The contemporary play stressed Ann's faith, and cast her as a figure in the Reformation, helping to shape Church of England doctrine. In the play, Ann meets William Tyndale after he attacked Henry VIII for seeking a divorce. Tyndale quotes Deuteronomy to justify his argument. Ann comes back with a contradictory verse from the book of Leviticus.

The playwright Howard Brenton described in *The Guardian* how that scene came about: 'Anne Boleyn and Tyndale never met but in my play they do (it's what playwrights call "the Schiller manoeuvre", after the great scene in *Maria Stuart* where Elizabeth I meets Mary Queen of Scots). Anne challenges him: which of the two (contradictory) verses is God's word? Tyndale replies that Leviticus refers to taking a brother's wife when the brother is still living.

ANNE: Nowhere does it say that!

TYNDALE: That is the revealed meaning.

ANNE: Revealed how?

TYNDALE: By prayer.

ANNE: Oh, then let's pray and make anything true!

This is the tyranny of the word of God. It is meant to free you. But interpret it wrongly – that is against the interpretation of the men with swords or guns – and it can kill.' (See the full *Guardian* article here: <http://bit.ly/1jQ3M6w>)

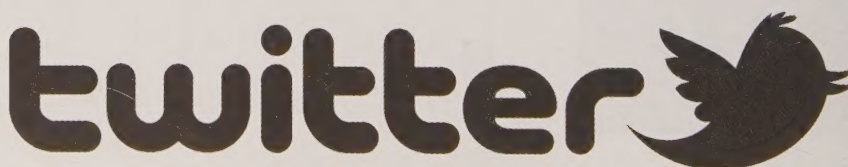
I have been thinking about that idea a lot lately, since learning of Meriam Ibrahim, the young mother in Sudan facing 100 lashes and death for being a Christian. (At presstime, she has just been rearrested when she tried to leave Sudan.)

The idea that a government can control belief – that all people should simply accept a specific, pre-digested version of religion – is straight out of Tudor times, and yet, so present in our world again.

That is why I was so pleased to read Celia Cartwright's cover story on the application of reason to faith – an essential part of Unitarianism. It is what makes us 'us'. And it gives us a mission to the world.

Also in this issue is a summary of the training by the 2020 Congregational Development group. If Celia's article gives us the 'why' of our faith, the argument for its unique importance; then 2020 gives us the 'how' – the practical ways to spread the Unitarian message of faith with reason.

— MC Burns



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‘Reason’ made Unitarians

Cherish reason in faith. It is what makes Unitarians essential, says
Celia Cartwright

‘Reason’, the second principle of our faith, is why we exist and how we gained the legal freedom to be here. Courageous souls in the distant past defied the laws of church and state and brought reason to bear when examining the Scriptures. They denied the Trinitarian conclusions as unsustainable. Most of these brave people suffered, many unto death, for their stance, which the church called ‘heresy’, a crime against ‘God’. But reason and strength prevailed and laws were changed, and the use of reason in religion has flourished amongst Unitarians.

By ‘reason’, I don’t mean ‘scepticism’, I mean genuine inquiry, searching, exploring different ways of seeing and understanding the same thing. ‘Reason’ is a cousin to ‘logic’ and yet it also retains a sense that for all our logic there is often something else, something not quiet known, yet deeply felt. Reason can be the fulcrum on which ideas and opinions are weighed.

Honoré de Balzac writes: ‘But reason always cuts a poor figure beside sentiment; the one being essentially restricted, like everything that is positive, while the other is infinite.’

Early seekers after the truth of God brought reason to bear on the scriptures. They looked at them in the languages in which they were originally heard – Aramaic and Greek. They examined the text and found the Trinity unfounded. They strove to bring ‘reason’ to bear on the church fathers, to question the doctrine, and most of them were silenced, imprisoned, even put to death.

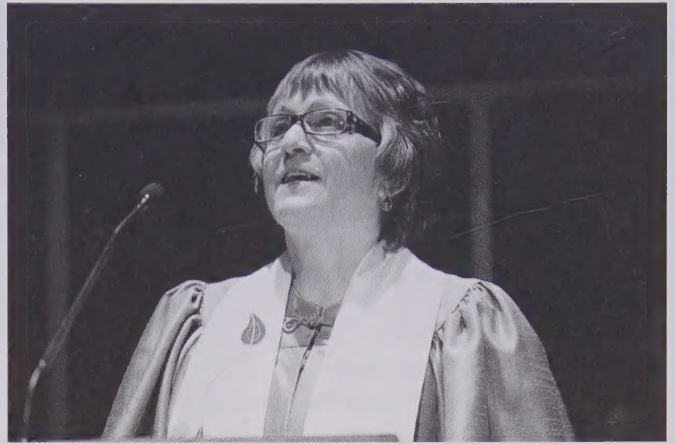
Michael Servetus of Spain, (1509 or 1511 – 1553) was a theologian, physician, cartographer, and Renaissance humanist. He was the first European to correctly describe the function of pulmonary circulation. He was a polymath, versed in sciences, mathematics, astronomy and meteorology, geography, human anatomy, medicine and pharmacology, as well as jurisprudence, translation, poetry and the scholarly study of the Bible in its original languages. He participated in the Protestant Reformation, and later developed a non-trinitarian Christology. Condemned by Catholics and Protestants alike, he was arrested in Geneva and burnt at the stake as a heretic by order of Calvin’s Protestant Geneva governing council.



Michael Servetus

Galileo Galilei was a 16th-century scientist, during the Inquisition when death was meted out to those who questioned the church’s doctrine. He gave humanity the telescope and the thermometer and questioned the church’s suspicions of any who attempted to use reason in the consideration of scripture and religion.

‘I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.’



Celia Cartwright speaking at the 2012 General Assembly.
Photo by Giles Croucher

He believed that, ‘By denying scientific principles, one may maintain any paradox.’ His irritation with the church is evident: ‘It vexes me when they would constrain science by the authority of the Scriptures, and yet do not consider themselves bound to answer reason and experiment.’ He was concerned for both the mind and the soul in its ignorance, believing that, ‘It is surely harmful to souls to make it a heresy to believe what is proved.’

Galileo Galilei was arrested, tried by the Inquisition and imprisoned, his sentence later transmuted to house arrest; we may consider him ‘lucky’ I suppose.

One of the founding fathers of America, Thomas Jefferson 1743 –1826, writing in a time when in Britain we were able to worship as we saw fit without fear of punishment, wrote:

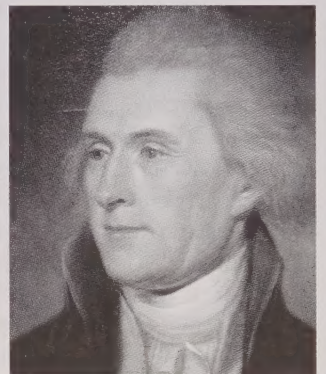
‘Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blind-folded fear.’

It’s a refreshing statement, both brave and exciting and as relevant today as it was in Jefferson’s time. It speaks of the possibility of different images of God, even the demise of God, when seen through the eyes of inquiring reason. It spoke of reason as a way of opening the mind through intellect and inquiry, not the blind and fearful following of required doctrine.

As a discipline, ‘reason’ might be seen as unfeeling as scientific proof, which can often seem dry and dusty stuff to those with minds which dance with rainbows and sing with the waves on the ocean. It can seem a blunt instrument for perceiving that which we know involves feeling, instinct, ‘knowing’.

The so-called ‘Age of Enlightenment’ fuelled much of the early exploration of science and religion. For many there was great excitement in the possibilities through the exploration of new learning, new ideas and a veritable explosion of new information, which did not always account for the intangible – feeling.

(Continued on next page)



Thomas Jefferson

We must keep flame of reason lit



'God does not die on the day when we cease to believe in a personal deity, but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illumined by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason.'

– Dag Hammarskjöld
UN/DPI photo via Wikimedia

(Continued from previous page)

Reason alone will not open the mind; passion is there too. And what was there in this new and bold scientific age for the religious inquirer with passion? Thomas Jefferson addressed this saying: 'If passion drives you, let reason hold the reins.' In looking at religious questioning, Jefferson also accepted the passion which lies within, and he cautions us to consider it's worthiness with reasoned thought.

The Age of Enlightenment spearheaded the move towards freedom for Unitarians, it put behind us centuries when arguing against accepted doctrine was considered 'heresy', punishable by trial, excommunication, imprisonment, fines, death. One might wonder how the ability to 'reason' ever survived.

We live in a more tolerant time, a time when differing opinions of religious thought are not – at least in most places – punished. We are free to bring reasoned thought, reasoned debate to our religious understanding. But do we? 'Ah', as Shakespeare said, 'there's the rub'! For as Blaise Pascal wrote, 'It is the heart which perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason.'

In my own experience of Unitarianism there have been mighty changes in the last 60 years. We have moved from being defined by our 'liberal Christianity', using the texts of other faiths to gather a sense of our ultimate one-ness, to a position where the strands of many faiths and none weave together, where liberal Christians, humanists, agnostics, a-theists, pagans, and those who have left any number of other faith bodies gather under one roof. We are evolving into a faith that can be a bridge between faiths. And we are doing it with reason and with emotion, instinct, feeling – with our whole selves, not just our intellect.

When we look at history, it is predominantly the scientists and mystics who have questioned. It is those with enquiring minds who have seen the flaws in the accepted understanding of Christian doctrine. It is those who had the ability and the will to steep themselves in the written word, and seek meaning therein; who have found the contradictions and inconsistencies and brought them to the attention of the church, the world. Today we all have the wherewithal to be the thinkers, the explorers, with the information of the world at our fingertips. And we have the freedom to explore these individually and together. If we don't, I believe we shall be on a journey back into fear and condemnation, into fear of the other's belief as it contradicts our own, and we shall gather in frightened groups, build barricades and fight.

We don't have to go far to find the barricades. Our congregation was sent a poster alerting us to the date of the local 'Women's World Day of Prayer'. It's a service which some of the Kendal congregation were intimately involved

in the organisation of – until just a few years ago. Then 'doctrine' was cited in order to ban 'Unitarian' thought from a 'Trintirian' service. That ban brought much hurt. It was the drawing up of a bridge that has not since been lowered. Our freedom to share in the organisation of a service for the 'women of the world' was taken away. It may be a small thing, but walls of all sizes are founded on small stones. In other parts of the world, children are murdered on charges of witchcraft; adults are hounded because they are homosexual – all in the name of religious doctrine.

If we, armed with the freedom to bring reason into our religious life and our spiritual journeying, forget to use the very gift which makes our freedom possible, we shall, in time, lose it.

Richard Dawkins said, 'The enlightenment is under threat. So is reason. So is truth. So is science.' And if you find Dawkins a little too strident in his anti-god stance, then harken to the wisdom of Thomas Paine, who wrote: 'Reason obeys itself; and ignorance submits to whatever is dictated to it.'

If we fail to keep the flame of reason alive in our spiritual lives, if we fail to keep that flame bright by research and inquiry, we will bring about the fall back into ignorance and fear. Barack Obama said recently in a speech to the American people that, 'Part of the reason that our politics seems so tough right now and facts and science and argument do not seem to be winning the day all the time is because we're hardwired not to always think clearly when we're scared. And the country's scared.'

It is imperative for us, in this time, to seek harmony between reason and instinct or passion, whether in politics or religion. We must not be led astray by fear or disaffection, but seek a balance in the co-dependency of reason and instinct. Instinct is so persuasive; it flatters our senses, but it can also be the opium that leaves us blind to reason. Let us not be wholly beguiled by the passion of the spiritual experience, but allow questioning. It was Albert Einstein who said, 'The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.'

The excitement of passion, the often indescribable feelings we may experience as we walk our spiritual paths, should not be allowed prominence without curiosity shining its light upon it.

Dag Hammarskjöld, illustrates this when he says, 'God does not die on the day when we cease to believe in a personal deity, but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illumined by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason.' Our ultimate understanding of 'God' or whatever word we choose to describe the indescribable (even if that is a negative understanding) is one where our poor reach of mind may well be unable to fully understand. But it is not a reason to abandon reason.

Let us continue to quest, to question, to consider, to think on, to ponder, to test, to view from different places. As we step onward together in our journey of faith, our quest for that holy grail of spiritual understanding, to answer the existential questions, to strive to understand what our lives are for. For if we fail, we shall lose our blessed freedom, we will cease to be a force for good.

The Rev Celia Cartwright is minister at Kendal.

Two aisles for two brides in Sheffield

By David Shaw

In 2013 I met Liz Keith and Jo Wilson who were initially considering our Upper Chapel, Sheffield's Channing Hall as a venue for a reception following their forthcoming Civil Partnership. When they realised that their Civil Partnership could take place in the Chapel, other plans began to unfold.

However, in the meantime, the law was fast changing too and as we entered 2014 there was the announcement that places of worship, wishing to do so, could 'opt in' and apply for registration.

Two things then happened simultaneously. We arranged to have congregational discussions after our services about the possibility of 'opting in' and at the same time Liz and Jo contacted me to ask if they could be married instead of having a Civil Partnership; as it was going to be legally possible from 29 March.

February saw the positive response of the congregation being taken to the Chapel Committee and the Trustees and the application process commenced. Being at the cutting



Liz Keith (l-r) and Jo Wilson in the doorway at Upper Chapel Sheffield. Photo submitted by David Shaw.

edge of both social and legal reform had its difficulties and challenges as we had to weave our way through the form-filling process and sought advice from head-scratching officials who were as new to the process as ourselves. Meanwhile, the forms were returned from the General Register Office as different boxes had to be ticked from the ones that we had been advised to complete!

We were delighted that the team at the Sheffield Registry office were supportive, helpful and about one minute's walk away from the Chapel. They guided us every step of the way as best they knew themselves.

Meanwhile, the date for the couple to 'give notice' drew near and with the building not registered it was a close-run thing what the couple were going to 'give notice' for! However, in the 'nick of time', the registration came through and we were destined to have our first same sex marriage.

Little did those who designed the interior of the Chapel ever think that one advantage of having two aisles

would be so that one day two brides, each with her father, would be able to process to the front to marry each other! Although the service itself was what might be called traditional in style, including readings and the singing of 'Morning Has Broken', history in the making was hanging thickly in the air. The Chapel's regular organist, Phil Croft, played on our grand piano 'Me and My Girl' from the musical and brought the ceremony towards its close with 'Happy Together' by the Turtles. Another 'first' was that as the registers were signed under the watchful eye of one of our Authorised Persons, Diane Day, it was in our newly renovated vestry.

It was the release of the news to the media after the ceremony that brought an invitation from Radio Sheffield to be interviewed on the following Sunday. At the time I was unaware that whilst my interview was being broadcast live the next guest, Helen Jackson the former MP for Hillsborough, was listening to me on her car radio.

At the conclusion of her time on the radio, in the tradition of the Sunday morning show, she was asked to nominate her choice for the loser and the winner of the week. How lovely it was that she chose Upper Chapel to be her 'winner of the week' for conducting Sheffield's first same sex marriage. Helen further explained her respect and affinity for the Unitarians much steered by her mother who had come from, "that religious tradition".

On Saturday, 24 May, amid all the 'history in the making' a couple, quite simply, proclaimed their love for each other and were married; and I was honoured to have been asked to conduct the ceremony.

The Rev David Shaw is minister at Upper Chapel, Sheffield.



Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians showed support for Equal Marriage at the 'Celebration of Equal Marriage' event organised by Newcastle City Council on Friday, 28 March, just before the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act became law at midnight. Pictured are Louise Reeve and Fiona Tait. Louise Reeve commented: 'We were honoured to be invited by the Council to attend the event at the city's Mansion House. It was a very happy occasion, and we were proud to represent our church – even if Fiona and I did have to explain to one or two people that actually, we're just good friends!'

York Unitarians announced that their congregation is the first in York to receive a certificate from the York Registrar giving permission to conduct same-sex marriages in the chapel as well as marriages between a man and a woman. Other Unitarian congregations which have announced their certification to conduct same-sex marriages include Cambridge, Godalming, Wakefield, Denton, Ullet Road, Liverpool, Lewisham, and Hampstead. Several others have applications pending.

Values-centred social media, a

By Ash James

The Rev Dr Terasa Cooley, programme and strategy officer for the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), had a message of optimism for delegates at the 2020 Congregational Development training week held at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow. She told participants gathered from across the UK and the world that it is possible to innovate from the inside out and that congregational growth is realisable. We may need to re-think the way we organise ourselves, but we do have that facility within our congregations, and the expertise is within reach.

The most essential thing is to place our core values at the heart of everything we do, allowing the possibility of a liberating and transformative experience, for Unitarians' lives and for those yet to engage with us.

The training came just after the announcement that Derby Friargate will be the first project to receive 2020 funding and support for growth. It is difficult to capture five days of training in one article, but themes emerged which were helpful to the Derby project, and benefit all groups working for growth.

Cultural Change

Technology and choice are more available than ever before – particularly in western culture. Liberality and the freedom for individual expression are more broadly accessible. We live within a changing cultural context, increasingly influenced by the 'millennial generation'. The 'Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life' says 'millennials' are 'forging a distinctive path into adulthood. Now ranging in age from 18 to 33, they are relatively unattached to organised politics and religion, linked by social media, burdened by debt, distrustful of people, in no rush to marry – and optimistic about the future'.¹

In the UK today, 22% of us are millennials.² – 'digital natives' who have grown up with digital communication, social media, and unprecedented access to information. The 'baby-boomers' are now also well-versed with freedoms and new technology, creating a disconnect between traditional ways we have shared Unitarian faith, and the way it now needs to be shared.

The writer and sociologist Alvin Toffler says 'the illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn'.³

The effective use of social media, new technology, different styles of leadership and the matching of values to contemporary relevances, may be prerequisites for growth. We may need to 'learn, unlearn and relearn'.

Putting the 'why' first

Talk of using social media can raise hackles. Some are stumped by the skills involved or by the scale. Others are unconvinced of the effectiveness of social media. No matter the method, the starting place for growth must lie with Unitarian values.

We each have a personal interpretation of the power of our faith. And, we have an understanding about the ethos that underpins our particular Unitarian community. Those values must shine through everything we say and do. They are the 'why'.

As the marketing industry knows, people are attracted by values. Any advert seeks to inspire by its lifestyle, 'feel', or create value with the product. As the consumer, you may not be immediately aware of the brand name. But you do remember how it made you feel.

That's a big step away from the traditional routes by which we



Participants in the 2020 congregational growth training held in May. Photo by Ash James

have communicated as Unitarians.

Information leaflets, newsletters, brochures, posters, A-Frame Boards, newspaper stories and a web page have an important part to play, but will they attract 'millennials'? Those methods will be more effective when integrated with a virtual-communication platform – appealing to a new audience. With sensitivity and support, social media communication can boost the self confidence of congregations. If expertise is unavailable, seek advice, and – if necessary – pay for the service. It can be cost-efficient.

Use every opportunity to describe why we live the lives we do; why we believe in the relationships we hold dear; why we respond to social justice issues; why we are involved with compassion.

Those attracted by our values will learn more. They may realise that they're not alone, that there are others who think along the same lines. It is much more powerful to find out for oneself – instead of simply being told something.

Individually or within community you may have tried to capture your own set of Unitarian values. One way to focus on this is to create a six-word descriptor. At the training, one group came up with: 'One beautiful world, wrapped in love'. Another chose, 'Connecting, compassionate, community, open, rainbow sanctuary'. The recently updated strapline produced by the GA's Visibility Group has a similar format: 'nurturing faith · embracing life · celebrating difference'.

The Derby Friargate project, the first chosen, is now receiving support and funds from 2020, and its progress will be reported upon regularly over the course of the next five years. 2020 is raising the next £100,000 we believe necessary for resourcing another new or rekindled congregation. 2020 will also continue with its role supporting broader Unitarian efforts to train for the leadership of growth, and is planning further opportunities in this area. For more information see: www.2020unitarian.org/

Adaptive leadership, keys to growth

In its preamble, the GA Object uses more than six words. But the values shine through; cooperation, tolerance, respect, dignity, freedom, conscience and truth⁴.

So, holding on to the 'why' is a significant and essential challenge, and one that we shall constantly need to keep reminding ourselves of as Unitarians, whatever our particular individual or community contexts.

Branding

Companies, corporations, charities – most organisations – use the brand' to raise awareness. Yet, when it comes to our faith, we shy away from it. Surely the Unitarian message needs to have the greatest possible prominence, after all, aren't its values at least as deserving of a voice in the world?

Branding can give a clear signal about Unitarians. It can tell people what Unitarian values are and show how we are different from other religious organisations and how we are relevant to their lives. Done successfully, branding should give an individual a 'gut feeling' about who we are. In essence, successful branding is not really centred on what we write about ourselves, but what our 'audience' feels.

While we shouldn't be afraid to use professional expertise, there is much we can do with a self-audit. For example, do our beliefs resonate with emerging cultural values? How does our faith interact with what might be seen as liberal causes? Our values become our most important asset, far beyond our buildings.

The practical way to do this is with an integrated presence using facebook and Twitter, by blogging and uploading videos on You Tube and other sites. Social media is the best tool for church growth outside of personal contact. It is an essential way of extending influence to the wider world.

Social media should coordinate with website, newspaper, magazine and other printed informational outlets. We need to say more than, 'you are welcome'. Images and stories about the values we hold will illustrate our values and attract those with similar ones.

We can have a superb, branded media presence that attracts a new audience to our building, only for an unappealing environment, unfriendly welcome or a joyless ceremony to undo all that hard work. We can still appear exclusive and impenetrable. Take a stranger around your building and ask them what they see. Or ask passers-by about Unitarianism; it can be quite instructive. The answers may help your brand audit.

Adaptive Leadership

Our leaders do well at solving 'technical problems', say fixing the church roof. Meetings are scheduled. Visits are planned. Budgets are set. All are essential tasks. But there is a more creative model of leadership, more flexible and able to adapt to changing paradigms.

Shared leadership is a doing and sharing activity in which the focus on the technical fix is reduced. Adaptive leaders depend on others, give responsibility to others. Trust is inherent. This approach relies less on personal expertise. It also lessens the likelihood of avoidance, a proxy fight or deferring to historic tradition. Shared leadership makes it more difficult to displace responsibility or scapegoat. It can prevent faction-forming.

Adaptive leaders should value the work done on technical problems. As Bill Darlison, past-president of the GA reminded us of, 'the unsung heroes of our denomination, those men and women whose names rarely appear in *The Inquirer* or *The Unitarian*, but

who tirelessly and lovingly make the grant applications, sit on the committees, supervise the work and perform the dozens of other behind-the-scenes tasks that ensure that our buildings remain in pristine shape'⁴ Caring for the practical aspects of our congregations paves the way for growth. Adaptive leadership touches the hearts of existing and future congregations.

One way to look at adaptive leadership is to consider 'the wisdom of my grandparents'. Free from the worries of parenting, grandparents

can offer liberating, warm, inclusive, non-judgmental and loving support. Many grandchildren learnt within their safe environment to make mistakes, think for themselves and unlock our abilities. There may be talents within Unitarianism that remain locked. Releasing them is a part of the adaptive challenge, and a reminder that we don't always need a 'top table' of influence and wisdom.

Adaptive leadership can lead to challenges. With its focus upon shared responsibility and the need to fulfil values, it may be necessary to speak of the 'elephant in the room' – whether it is a lack of financial resources or a person exhibiting an unhelpful influence. Adaptive leadership makes it harder to tailor decision-making around individuals at the expense of the majority view.

Challenging constraints through shared dialogue, with the 'why?' of what we do firmly in mind, can enable all parties to stay in the relationship. Dialogue distinguishes between opinion and values. It is less accusative and judgmental and equality trumps all other considerations. Conflict, handled effectively, can be transformative. It enables differences to surface and can be an opportunity to learn.

Next steps

The course gave practical insights into strategies and perspectives that assist growth and gave a chance for supportive reflection and discussion among attenders. It enabled further planning in support of the Derby project and the 2020 programme.

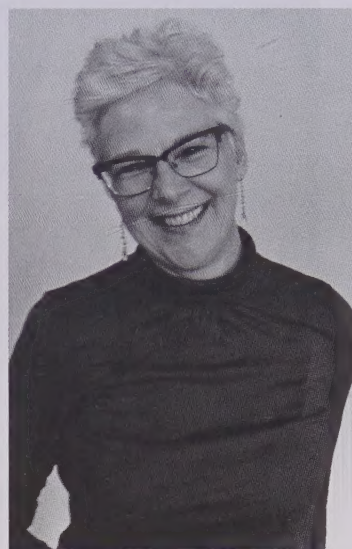
In common with all GA-affiliated groups, we are a voluntary yet passionately determined team. We never claim to know all the answers, and are grateful to those preceding and noble GA groups who have challenged us to look to the future, and to those inspiring examples of Unitarian growth around the country. This is a common task, something that binds us all. We need as much help as you can give.

For more details on this training course, and for more general information, references, and contacts, please go to the 2020 web site at www.2020unitarian.org/ Thank you for your support so far, and please, do get in touch.

Ash James is a member of the 2020 leadership group.

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The Rev Dr Terasa Cooley

Doris never met a committee she didn't join

When I was 18 I was interviewed by Elizabeth Hoodless (yes, yes, THE Dame Elizabeth Hoodless) who said; 'I can see you are going to be a committee woman.' And, oh boy, was she right! Show me a committee and I'm on it. Not because I love committees. I hate all sorts of things about committees.

What I hate the most is when one group gets a bee in its bonnet and, despite my protestations, we have to spend ages discussing some little, tiny point over which some people get really aerated and then, despite my protestations, a proposal is put and a vote has to be taken. And then we have two groups in the committee, one happy and one sad; and, in the worst case, one triumphant and gloating and the other glum and feeling undervalued. And when I complain over coffee I am told: 'It was a matter of principle.' Principle, schminciple. You know where you can put your beloved principles.

And then we have the people who go on and on and on and on; they can only think with their mouth open and they don't know what they are going to say until they've said it. And then we have the little groups that start mini meetings, usually three at once – how am I supposed to minute these? And then we have the people who never speak in the meeting but who have plenty to say behind the tea urn.

My favourite committee meetings are the ones that I chair. The garrulous get shut up, the silent are forced to speak, proposals that I disapprove of are cast out, every proposal that is passed then has to have an implementer and a time frame, and we all get home in time to see 'The Onedin Line' (BBC 1971-1980 21.30).

I read of an American company that holds all its committee meetings standing up to stop waffling. Good idea. I attended a lecture by a New Zealand head teacher who insisted that every policy document had a section at the bottom which stated who was going to implement it, by when and the criteria by which they would know whether it had been successful, or not. Great idea.



I like the Congregationalists who feel that everyone in the church should be involved in the church meeting and that this is as important as worship. I like the Quakers who allow no proposal to go through until consensus is reached.

You cannot become an Anglican or a Roman Catholic without going through some form of training and a ceremony. I think we need Dissenters' training – in being an effective committee member – and then you should only be admitted as a member of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches if you promise to attend all church meetings. I think you should kneel before the communion table (All right, all right, the coffee table or the Women's League banner) and, with your hand on the purple book, say: 'I solemnly swear that I shall attend all church meetings, that I shall speak my mind succinctly, that I shall show tolerance towards the ideas and thoughts of others, that I shall not speak ill of others behind the tea urn and that I shall do my utmost to see that all proposals are implemented by the appointed date.'

Now, rather than swanning up to me and saying: 'I love your column' (which, believe me, I absolutely love, thank you, thank you, little egotist that I am), go into your congregation and turn your dull, ineffective, undersupported church committee into something vibrant and active and purposeful. And when you have done this, write to *The Inquirer* and tell us what you did and how you did it.

Dorothy Haughton is a service leader in the Midlands.

Ipswich members said good bye to Jerome Mack

Inquirer readers may remember the Human Relations workshops conducted by Jerome Mack in many of our churches and districts some years ago.

Jerome's refreshingly positive and highly professional approach to the fraught subject of so-called "race awareness" was highly valued by more people than just ourselves! In particular, he worked with bodies such as the Home Office, the Prison Service, and a number of police forces. Jerome and his wife, Francesca, were based at a former hotel in Turvey, near Bedford, which they had converted into a residential centre for their courses, seminars, and workshops.

They have been retired for several years. Before moving to Turvey, the Macks lived in Felixstowe. At that time they and their three children were very active members at the Unitarian Meeting House in Ipswich. After the move to Bedfordshire, they maintained links with the congregation and, very occasionally, still came to services.

Jerome, a former USAF officer, has not been in the best of health recently and he and Francesca moved back to the United States earlier this year. Before the move, they held a farewell party in Turvey, attended by several Ipswich Unitarians, including minister emeritus, the Rev Cliff Reed.



Ipswich Unitarians at the leaving party for the Macks, held at Turvey. Seated: Jerome and Francesca Mack. Standing l – r: Ivan Hamilton, Rosemary Hamilton, the Rev Cliff Reed, Malcolm Hawes, Linda King, Sandra Hawes, Paulette Reed. Photo submitted by Linda King.

Lively book takes on creationism

Review of Graham Richards, *Creationism: Design Errors and Cross-Purposes*, The Lindsey Press, London 2014, £9.00 + p&p (available from Essex Hall, tel. 020 7240 2384) ISBN: 0853190844

By Stephen Bostock

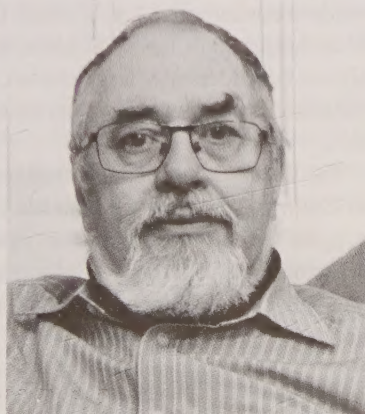
Professor Graham Richards' *Creationism* is a lively, wide-ranging, stimulating book, but it has problems. In places I disagree with him a lot, but I've learnt from him too, and have had to look up several other books, not a few mentioned in his useful notes, to check on matters either new to me or that I'd forgotten.

Problems? Well for a start, the title. We all know Creationism is not only wrong but ridiculous, even though so many Americans take it seriously. So much of the book deals with other subjects that it will be a pity if potential readers ignore it because of its title. I may be wrong here because at least one aspect of Creationism must interest many of us: why on earth do so many millions believe it? Who better to shed light on this weird phenomenon than a professor of psychology such as the author?

Another problem. Richards is also discussing another 'theory', Intelligent Design or ID, which he regards as just a variant on the view that God created everything in six days a few thousand years ago. It's true that ID sometimes seems to have been dreamed up merely to help anti-evolutionist parents in the USA to get their Darwinist doubts into the schoolroom, but I think myself that ID *isn't* just Creationism re-jigged. It's actually a lot more interesting, though of course still wrong.

ID isn't 'particularly hostile to mainstream evolutionary thought' (Richards' words); it accepts natural selection as explaining a good deal of the living world, but draws the line at so-called examples of 'irreducible complexity' like the human eye or (famously) the bacterial flagellum, which believers in ID think must have required divine intervention. (The bacterial flagellum is a fascinating mechanism, perhaps the only example of a wheel-like device in the animal world, but the suggestion that God kindly stepped in to help out the poor old bacteria, which Stephen Jay Gould claimed have always been the most successful organisms, is to me wonderfully ludicrous.) Richards also says that ID exponents 'are generally less committed to the 6,000-years time span', but I don't think they are committed to it at all. (I'd like to add that postulating a divine designer because of 'the basic laws of physics which underpin the universe' is, in my view, a highly reputable position, unlike doing the same 'to explain the complexity of life forms'; this is not a distinction that Richards makes.)

Despite this initial muddying of the ID waters, Richards goes on to develop an elaborate and interesting analysis of the concept of design, and its non-relationship, as he sees it, to the concept of complexity. He establishes successfully that modern ID proponents are mistaken in claiming William Paley, author of *Natural Theology* (1802), as a



Graham Richards

distinguished forerunner. Paley was describing the wonders of nature to prove the existence of their designer, God, while ID proponents today are claiming that demonstrating biologically or mathematically the hand of a (non-specified) designer in living things has the status of a science.

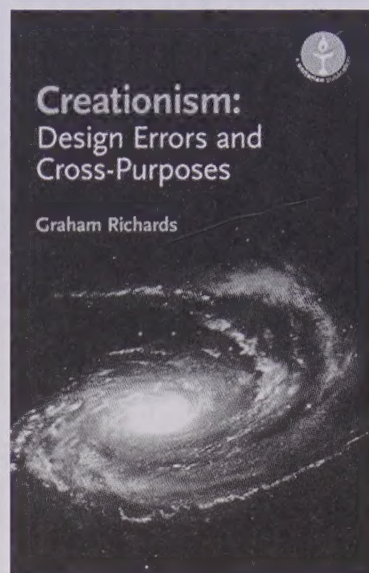
I am less happy with Richards' argument that Paley was wholly mistaken in claiming that the complexity of living beings was evidence of their design. For myself, I side with Richard Dawkins who respects Paley for recognising that the complexity of living things required an explanation, even though a very different explanation was to come in 1859 from the pen of Charles Darwin. Richards remarks that Paley's claims had no scientific relevance, but I'd argue that they did, via the influence that Paley's book had upon Darwin, who read it with enthusiasm as a student at Cambridge. I think it was because Darwin had so thoroughly absorbed Paley's argument that every detail of living things, including their distribution in the world, was the work of God, that he was so struck by what he learnt only a few years later on the Galapagos Islands about the differences between the mockingbirds and other wildlife on the different islands and their similarity to their mainland relatives.

He realised that invoking God as explanation didn't make sense, and found another explanation not long afterwards in his own theory of natural selection, thanks to reading Thomas Malthus' book on population.

I've mentioned Dawkins, a controversial figure to some. Unlike Richards, I greatly admire him as an interpreter of evolution, although I think he has a closed mind on religion and also on paranormal research. I realise that he has his biological critics also, but to call his concept of the selfish gene a 'particularly sloppy rhetorical move', as Richards does, damages Richards rather than Dawkins. He can reasonably disagree with Dawkins of course, but as evidence that the concept of the selfish gene was a spark of brilliance which has assisted many distinguished biologists in their research work, I would draw his attention to a book edited by two of his former graduate students, Alan Grafen and Mark Ridley: *Richard Dawkins: How a Scientist Changed the Way We Think* (OUP 2006).

I have nothing but praise for much of the rest of the book, where Richards discusses many other matters such as the Bible and the relation between literal and symbolic meaning, the nature of mind, the paranormal, the numinous, and, especially, Creationism as a psychological phenomenon. Nonsense though Creationism is, Professor Richards is correct in stating that its UK followers are increasing in number. I hope his book will help to stem the tide.

Stephen Bostock is a member of Glasgow Unitarians.



Letters to the Editor

Support Lord Falconer's assisted-dying bill

To the Editor:

In reply to Doris's Column in the 7 June issue on the Assisted Dying motion at the 2013 Unitarian General Assembly meetings. Those who feel as I do that, an assisted dying bill would not result in more people dying, but in fewer people suffering, may indeed be able to make a difference by supporting Lord Falconer QC, the former Lord Chancellor. His bill will have its second reading in the House of Lords on 18 July.

Lord Falconer will be reintroducing his Assisted Dying Bill in the House of Lords in the near future. You can help by telephoning Dignity in Dying on 02074797730 or email info@dignityindying.org.uk or look up facebook.com/dignityindying.

For the Unitarians who take a different point of view, I respect your end-of-life wishes. Please respect mine.

Wilna Roberts

Sevenoaks

Esperantaj estas sukceso

Esperanto is a success

Estimata Redaktistino (Dear Editor), I enjoyed the Rev Phil Silk's article 'Language shapes our experience' in *The Inquirer* dated 7 June. But to say that Esperanto 'has not been very successful' begs the question 'What is success?' Since Dr Zamenhof's first book in 1887, Esperanto has become a living language, used by a diaspora of people, of whom many espouse and campaign for Esperanto's underlying notions of equality, tolerance and mutual friendship among nations.

Kore salutas vin (Yours sincerely),

Angus Wilkinson

Selby

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes.

Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.

View from a new(ish) Unitarian

Inquirer presented three interesting views

By Nigel Johnson

As a new(ish) member of Norcliffe Chapel in Cheshire I have found *The Inquirer* interesting and sometimes mystifying. However I am moved to write following reading these articles in the 21 June edition: 'Meeting Potential Members Outside Church' by Nicky Jenkins, 'Is this the "Unitarian tarantella?"' by Ant Howe and Ann Howell's 'SimpleGifts on the road ahead'. All in their different ways, the stories were about expanding rather than contracting the denomination.

Generally much of *The Inquirer's* content is inspirational or rather obscure with a lot of acronyms. But as someone who found the congregation comparatively recently, I feel I have a view to offer. I was excited by the work of Mike Walsh which Nicky Jenkins writes about – in particular his approach of asking people what they do or think.

Certainly from what I can gather, the Unitarian chapels nearby all have different congregations and situations. For instance, Norcliffe is a pretty chapel in a pretty location and attracts quite a few wedding couples – which suggests a wide variety of reasons for going, and different things that people get from their attendance. So in this age of 'Survey Monkey' and Facebook, it might be an idea to take some pains to find out what church attenders find to keep them going.

I suspect there will be common themes, but also variations according to the chapel, as, for instance, Nicky Jenkins points out Chorlton is in a fashionable, diverse and cosmopolitan district with a 'young' population. In addition there is Mike Walsh's approach, going out and talking to people. Hard

on shoe leather and so not for everyone but, again, perhaps modern media could help in finding out what people think – what, in particular, people are looking for. Perhaps by doing this we could find clues about what people might want, what they might find useful in their lives and consider if some, any or all of those things are what Unitarians could offer.

By simple surveys, through congregations, comments pages and so on, the denomination might then build a better profile of what it offers of value to its members and some clues as to the value it might offer to people generally, or those who pop in to chapels, events, facebook or website/s.

So back to me. In fact I researched Unitarianism on the internet and chose the congregation (the nearest with an evening service) through the same medium. Though in my 50s, my way in was, in effect, very much in the mode of the modern consumerist age. Though I baulk as so describing it, in Manchester and Cheshire I had a wide choice to 'buy' from an almost bewilderingly large choice. So it was important that all the choices on offer were clear about themselves and described this.

The Inquirer articles inspired me to take the plunge (rather as Danny Crosby suggests in his piece in the same issue) and suggest Unitarians look at the question of arresting decline or growing membership by thinking in terms of what's the 'offer' and to whom is it to be offered? Then we could consider the how.

Nigel Johnson is a member of Norcliffe Chapel, Styal.

Comment

Freedom, progress, respect for difference

On 17 May, Maud Robinson, minister at St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh, spoke at Edinburgh's Dyke March, a celebration of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans women. This is an excerpt of what she said.

I accepted the invitation to speak at today's rally, because, as a minister of religion, I wanted to challenge myself and my community of Unitarians in Edinburgh to learn more about what a Dyke March is all about. As a preacher I'm very aware of the importance of language – the importance of the words we use to describe ourselves; so I wanted to learn more about why gay women are reclaiming the word dyke to describe themselves.

I'm beginning to find my way through the labyrinthine terminology of lesbian, gay woman, dyke, bi-gender, gender-



Maud Robinson

queer, non-binary and intersex – and I salute those women here today who fall outside what has been considered normative and who are willing to stand up loud and proud about their gender identity.

Unitarians in Edinburgh is a spiritual community which operates under the principles of Freedom / Progress / and Respect for Difference. We respect difference in approach to spiritual practice and belief – our members are Christian, Buddhist, Humanist, Agnostic, Earth-Spiritual.

We also respect difference in gender identity. We're not an LGBT community – but we certainly are an LGBT-welcoming community. Our members range in age from a couple of months to over 90 years, and when I led us into the campaign for Equal Marriage, working closely with the Equality Network – there was not one word of dissent – from parents of young families / from 80- and 90-year-olds. I'm proud to be part of a spiritual community which really tries to live out its ideal of 'respect for difference.'

Have a wonderful day celebrating and supporting LGBT women in Scotland – and if you're looking for a minister to officiate at your wedding – you know where to come.

Almost, but not quite Coventry Cathedral!

By Peter Hewis

Seventy-seven years ago the then minister and members of the Great Meeting House in Coventry had the vision to move out of the city centre and relocate to the Holyhead Road. Land was bought and a modern building erected containing one of the first Hammond organs brought to Britain and some tip-up cinema-style seats. Although not many people drove cars in 1937, the congregation planned for adequate car parking and built the premises all on one level.

As with many 77 year olds there has been wear and tear so much work was needed on the buildings. Financing the work was beyond the small but loyal membership so the Trustees asked for denominational help to fund a Feasibility Study and a Quantity Surveyor's report. The then-GA Millennium Fund gave £3500 in 2009 and the John Gregson Trust £500; now although much work still needs to be done that money enabled work to start and to obtain grants from outside bodies.

What work has been done? It includes some exterior work including several new windows, a new hall floor, hall painting, kitchen painting and work to remedy condensation, new heating boilers, a complete rebuild of the toilets to provide access for the disabled, a new water supply from the main road and a new gas supply. Further work is planned including work to the tower, more new windows, roof insulation to the church and hall plus renovation of the Ladies toilets.

Where did the money come from? Grants towards the work have come from the Midland Unitarian Association £5000, The Big Lottery Fund £6322 (for the hall floor), John



The Great Meeting House, Coventry Unitarian Church hosts several diverse groups. Photo submitted by Peter Hewis

Gregson Trust £2000, Garfield Weston Foundation £5000, 29 May 1961 Trust £2000, Coventry General Charities £2000 and Awards for All gave £10000 towards access for the disabled.

Now the many organisations using the premises can benefit from modern facilities. But without the initial help from our denomination, the John Gregson Trust and Midland Unitarian Association, the outside bodies would not have made any grants. It also helped when we named the varied groups using the premises ranging from the Parkinson's Society to an Art group and from Gamblers Anonymous to a Welsh Presbyterian congregation. The advice of our architect Kenneth Holmes was invaluable because Kenneth has a vast knowledge of local grant making bodies.

The Rev Peter Hewis is minister emeritus at Oxford.

Bury celebrates 40-year anniversary

By Anne Mills

Bury Unitarian Church decided to mark its 40th Anniversary with a special celebration, this year. On Sunday, 1 June, the sun shone throughout the day, thus demonstrating that its members clearly have influence! Some 90 people attended the special service, including the Mayor and Mayoress of Bury, Councillor Sharon Briggs and Shirley Rabbett, and it was wonderful to see the church full and to hear some very hearty singing. Chris Price on the organ, and the choir, contributed to the excellence of the music. Val Chamberlain and John Allerton supplied thought-provoking readings about the desirability of working together, in unity, and about the importance of a church's ministry to it, in real terms; a minister needs to be part and parcel of the church's very fabric, working alongside its members, in order to achieve its goals,

The Rev Beryl Allerton, who conducted the service, explored these themes during the service; when the three congregations of Bank Street, Chesham and Heywood first amalgamated, in 1974, it was not, initially, easy to reconcile ideas, desires and personalities. But, with tolerance, patience and humour, harmony was achieved – a step of the utmost importance. Beryl also referred to the newly formed congregation's, 'hippie' Minister (the Rev John Allerton), with his long hair and John Lennon-type glasses: 'We all fell in love with him,' she said, 'including me!' John and Beryl celebrate their 30th Wedding Anniversary, in August.

Towards the end of the sermon, the congregation was asked to stand, in order to observe a minute's silence in memory of all those members who had died since the new church came into being; many of their names were listed on the service-sheet; all of them are remembered with great respect and affection; the church is the poorer for their passing.

A superb service was followed by an excellent buffet-lunch, complete with wine and birthday-cakes, specially baked by the Chairman of the Congregation and decorated by her daughter; the Mayor and Mayoress cut a symbolic slice



The Mayor of Bury, Councillor Sharon Briggs, and the Mayoress, Shirley Rabbett, with the Reverend Beryl Allerton, (centre) outside the church. Photo by Howard Maden

of the cake, and the lunch-guests drank a toast to the church and its 40 successful years. Other local congregations were represented, and congratulations and best wishes were sent by several people unable to attend. Many of those present expressed their appreciation of the warmth and friendliness of the welcome they had received, and commented that the atmosphere throughout the day had been truly remarkable. The 40th Anniversary Celebrations continue with a special Lunch for the congregation, in October.

Anne Mills is a member of the Bury Congregation.



Yorkshire Unitarian lay preachers met at Flowergate Chapel, Whitby, in June for a discussion led by Stephen Carile on 'Drawing Children into Worship'. There was considerable added value in having Stephen's almost-teenage son, Joshua, present for the last part of the morning to give his views on attending services. He particularly valued having some part to play, especially undertaking one of the readings. He also mentioned how much he enjoys Junior Weekends. Photo by Kate Taylor

UCA meets on 19 July

The summer gathering of the Unitarian Christian Association will take place at 2pm on Saturday, 19 July at the site of the former Mansford Street Church and Domestic Mission in London's Bethnal Green neighbourhood.

It will be an opportunity to learn about the rich heritage of Unitarian Christian engagement with urban ministry, as the Rev David Usher will provide the background story to the Domestic Mission movement. The Rev Rob Gregson will then provide an insight into the contemporary incarnation of this commitment to the Social Gospel with a presentation on a new justice initiative, SimpleGifts: Unitarian Centre for Social Action. Rob will introduce those attending the day's events to the work and witness of this new project, which addresses a variety of needs in one of London's more multi-faith, ethnically diverse and economically stratified areas.

The programme for the day will begin with an act of worship, which includes a tribute to the life and ministry of the late Rev Jane Barraclough, as she served the former congregation. It would be helpful to indicate your interest in attending by contacting Jeff Gould, UCA Events Officer. Email jeffreylanegould@btinternet.com or telephone 01625 403 509.